

NOTES

1. A section of "Raven," from *Winter Constellations* (Boise: Ahsahta Press, 1977).
2. First stanza of "To Insure Survival," from *Carriers of the Dream Wheel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
3. A section of "Crow Hill," from *Selected Poems, 1957-1967* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

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Bringing Home the Fact: Tradition and Continuity in the Imagination

PAULA GUNN ALLEN

"My grandfather is dead," Abel repeated. His voice was low and even. There was no emotion, nothing.

"Yes, yes. I heard you," said the priest, rubbing his good eye. "Good Lord, what time is it, anyway? Do you know what *time* it is? I can understand how you must feel, but . . ."

But Abel was gone. Father Olguin shivered with cold and peered out into the darkness. "I can understand," he said. "I understand, do you hear?" And he began to shout. "I understand! Oh, God! I understand—I understand!"¹

I

The way of the Imagination is the way of continuity, circularity, completeness. The way of the intellect is the way of segmentation, discontinuity, linearity. We persist over time; we endure. We forget our origins and lay waste to the claims of the past, simultaneously deeming them to be the only truth, but not overtly. The novel is a construct, an act of the imagination struck in coherence, a whole that signifies something about life and mind. The imaginative construction of personhood is the best, and perhaps the only kind of life, as N. Scott Momaday suggests when he writes that "an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself."²

As much can be said of any person, of any society, of any civilization, and of any work of art. For human beings, life is a continuous act of the imagination. When old Ko-sahn appears before Momaday's amazed eyes, she tells him the truth about the imagination: "You have imagined me well," she says, "and so I am." And, in confusion, he replies that all of this imagining is taking place in his mind—that she is not actually in the room with him.

"Be careful of your pronouncements, grandson," she answers.

You imagine that I am here in this room, do you not? That is worth something. You see, I have existence, whole being, in your imagination. It is but one kind of being, to be sure, but it is perhaps the best of all kinds. If I am not here in this room, grandson, then surely neither are you.³

Ultimately, perhaps, it would be fair to say that it is the imagination which provides continuity in literature and in life. Yet, while continuity is a necessary process, it is not necessarily recognized when it occurs. The point of this discussion is to examine the phenomenon of continuity as it exists in the study of literature within the university, and as it applies to the study of modern American Indian literature.

There is an impulse toward wholeness that characterizes the act of writing; this impulse is the essential nature of thought and is the primary motivating principle of the imagination. In the university, this impulse is continuously met with a counterimpulse toward fragmentation, toward what, in the terms of William Carlos Williams's poem "Paterson," is divorce, the failure of communication and completion. The terms of the discussion are not whole; the circuit, broken at some point, cannot carry the impulse clearly over from wherever the writer has brought it to the audience. The essential linkage is that of tradition: of the symbols and structures shared in a deeply buried unconsciousness by a community of people.

This impulse toward whole articulation, toward realizing what Ezra Pound defined as an intellectual and emotional complex presented in an instant of time, has led writers again and again toward the source of the imagination in their time, their history, their landscape, and their mythic roots. But in America these roots are confused. The American writer's time is not only that of a technological, industrial, urban present; his or her history is not only that of

Aristotle, Aquinas, Dante, Luther, Milton, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, and Hemingway. The American writer's landscape is not that of France, England, Italy, Greece, or Egypt; the myths that embody his or her vision and hold it secure for all peoples in all times and histories is not only that of the Old Testament and the New. Writing is the attempt of the single being to articulate the singleness of that being; it is, then, a primary act of the imagination: to articulate, in an instant of time, what is known and felt; to erase chronology and to present simultaneity. So Ko-sahn tells her grandson when he asks her how old she is:

"I do not know," she replied. "There are times when I think that I am the oldest woman on earth. You know, the Kiowas came into the world through a hollow log. In my mind's eye I have seen them emerge, one by one, from the mouth of the log. I have seen them so clearly, how they were dressed, how delighted they were to see the world around them. I must have been there. And I must have taken part in that old migration of the Kiowas from the Yellowstone to the Southern Plains, near the Big Horn River, and I have seen the red cliffs of Palo Duro Canyon. I was with those who were camped in the Wichita Mountains when the stars fell."⁴

In her imagination, Ko-sahn can realize what has gone into the making of her own consciousness. It is not significant that she was not personally present when the Kiowas emerged from the hollow log; she is capable of the most profound act of comprehension. She can make real, in her imagination, what would otherwise be an empty, albeit important, occurrence in the history of the Kiowa.

Literature reflects the deepest meanings of a community. It does this by carrying forward archetypes through the agency of familiar symbols arranged within a meaningful structure. It is the sequence in which the archetypes occur which allows the depth we customarily associate with literature, just as it is the accretion of meaning created by this structuring which gives a sense of wholeness and immediacy to the work.

The juxtaposition of certain symbols in particular sequence makes the inner meaning of these charged formulations apparent. This creates an understanding between audience and story that, under certain circumstances, can lead to the sort of act of imagina-

tion that Momaday encountered when Ko-sahn appeared before him. Whether this imaginative act be written or spoken is not important; what is important is that it be whole, entire, and in its entirety create a like wholeness in one's connection to another:

Who is the storyteller? Of whom is the story told? What is there in the darkness to imagine into being? What is there to dream and to relate? What happens when I or anyone exerts the force of language upon the unknown?⁵

Momaday is concerned with the source of reality. For, he implies, it is this source, created through vision within the human mind, which allows for the essential coherence upon which all society and all art depend. I might add that the source of this reality is probably not accessible directly to human consciousness, though it is accessible, to a greater or lesser extent, indirectly. It is through the agency of symbolization that we are able to communicate, outside of time, our total vision of reality. Further, it is the nature of symbols, layered with significance as they are, to convey levels of meaning that are not otherwise conveyable by language. It is also the nature of the symbol to communicate to others those intuitions which seize us. "If there is any absolute assumption in back of my thoughts tonight," he continues, "it is this: We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined."⁶

The primary impulse of the imagination is wholeness. It is, in that sense, the faculty which relates exterior perception to interior impression. It closes the circuit, as it were, between I and other, creating a coherent relationship, a meaningful vision of what is.

Charles Olson, a truly American poet, premised his poetics on this idea. His search into Native American poetics and usages was directed by this conviction. He "saw this break between the spirit [energy] and the immediate object as the major fracture of meaning confronting the modern poet."⁷ His thrust as poet and as formulator of a poetic for American writers was in the direction of wholeness, which he found embodied in Mayan glyphs, of which he wrote: "Signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images."⁸

Olson incorporated this notion into "The Kingfishers," where the confusion and bewilderment of modern existence are contrasted with the E on the stone; he saw those glyphs as a measure of the interrelationship of the object with its environment, so that the object was not an object but a significance. It is important to note here that significance is a function of what is known. It arises out of the total context of interrelated elements, allowing the mind to attribute meaning to a single object by virtue of its placement within an entire field. This process is continuity; we may alter singular elements in particular ways, but their meaningfulness will only be apparent because of their connection to one another within a previously known or assumed pattern. In acknowledgment of this, Olson writes, in "The Kingfishers":

Dead, hung up indoors, the kingfisher
will not indicate a favoring wind,
or avert the thunderbolt. Nor, by its nesting
still the waters, with the new year, for seven days.
It is true, it does nest with the opening year, but not on the waters.
It nests at the end of a tunnel bored by itself in a bank. There,
six or eight white and translucent eggs are laid, on fishbones
not on hare clay, on bones thrown up in pellets by the birds.

On these rejections

[as they accumulate they form a cup-shaped structure] the young are
born.

And, as they are fed and grow, this nest of excrement and decayed fish
becomes
a dripping, fetid mass.⁹

The relationship between the whole and the part is the relationship of the egg to the nest, and the flight to the bird; or, as Olson's credited source for his theory, Alfred North Whitehead, has phrased it, "the notion of existence involves the notion of an environment of existence and of types of existences. Any one existence involves the notion of other existences, connected with it and yet beyond it."¹⁰

It is significant that much of Olson's poetic is formulated out of a belief in the primal, the relation of person-acting to the space in which the action occurs, the mythological and ritual which sometimes results from this interaction, and the consequent integration and reintegration of being into significance as process. While, as

Robert Bertholf observes in his essay "On Olson, His Melville," Olson finally feels that he can move beyond the myth and the ritual and settle for a poetic based on non-Euclidian geometry and quantum physics. This movement is more likely a result of not being able to articulate what he can envision, because he does not come out of a tradition of the whole, because he does not address a community that assumes that holism is valuable and primary to coherence, and because there is no ritual circle to which he undeniably belongs.¹¹ Rather, Olson speaks from and to a community that is alienistic in its primary perceptions, and whose basic premise is that human beings, particularly civilized, advanced ones, are necessarily isolate individuals, not varying expression-forms of a greater whole. The belief that isolation is fundamental to mature human consciousness makes the integrated perception of unity or of wholeness unacceptable in intellectual discourse.

Yet Olson's original impulse is accurate, whether or not he understood that it is the nature of poetry to unite itself with the highly charged symbols of the ancient, ritual-centered past. By carrying forward those image-constructs which reach beyond our fragmented present, the poem unites us to our own meaning. Evidently, Olson did not realize that non-Euclidian geometry and quantum physics are themselves reformulations of ancient understandings, or that they derive their potency from their congruence with universal law and their significance in human terms from their inextricable relationship to ritual. He assumed that the ancients could make glyphs, but that the moderns alone can make sense. But though poet is maker, and the task of the poet is to make us whole, this task is simultaneously the task of shamans and an effect of ritual understandings and perceptions. It cannot be accomplished in the absence of a commonly held belief, a worldview, that incorporates the likelihood of real transformations in its everyday thinking.

In his study of Charles Olson and Herman Melville, Robert Bertholf comments on the roots of the dichotomizing consciousness implicit in the Western Judeo-Christian worldview, which, he says, enacts separation as a major premise of existence. "In separation," Bertholf comments,

a hero is one who most successfully asserts his will over reality. . . . The imperative of "the Lordship over nature" widens the estrangement between man and his environment, isolating him

from the roots of his existence, and necessitating the manufactory of catalogues and systems of thought and analysis to replace the natural, multiphasic environment, now neglected.¹²

One can trace this archetypal pattern from Genesis forward. The central motif of the Bible is the distance between God and Man; its primal thrust is reunification of the shattered, alienated psyche.

Nor is the motif confined to the Bible. It is a basic premise of literary criticism: The tragedy is that imaginative construct which chronicles the separation of the hero from the source of his being; his flaw is preeminently that of perceiving himself as more than, or different from, his own being in its godly and/or human components. The comedy, on the other hand, is an imaginative construct that chronicles the reunification of the hero/heroine with society, God, and self. And what is the story of the Fall and the Redemption, if not the tale of separation/fragmentation and its obverse, reunification/integration? Deeply embedded in the consciousness of Western peoples as these primal motifs are, there is an underlying motif implicit in these: an assumption of wholeness as essentially good, and of separation as essentially evil.

If we are familiar with the Bible, we are in a position to understand the greater part of Western lore: Western literature, art, science, and mathematics are all, to some extent, based on the perceptual modes which the Bible embodies. On a conscious level, this is fairly easy to perceive. But there are unspoken assumptions about the nature of truth and, therefore, the nature of meaning, that have also come to us through attitudes toward the Scriptures that are not so apparent. The belief that written works are more worthy of intellectual consideration, are more factual, or more believable, or more respectable, is one of those unspoken ideas which has been transmitted through the generations. This is the structure of the university, at base. Were it not for this belief that worthwhile matters are written, indeed, are printed, because the Bible, the "source of all truth," was the earliest manuscript to find its way into print, there would be no university as we know it today. The impact which symbol structures have on our minds and on our modes of perception and being cannot be minimized. Continuity, that process which gives our individual lives their coherence and significance, is a factor of every facet of those lives. The meanings of the past create the significance of the present. *Scriptural* and

written mean the same thing. It is no accident that literacy is so highly valued in the West. The fact that an imaginative act is written is as important to a scholar as the fact that a chantway heals is to a Navajo.

II

Life is a mystery play. Its players are cosmic principles wearing the mortal masks of mountain and men. We have only to lift the masks which cloak us to find at last the immortal gods who walk in our image across the stage.¹³

As familiarity with the Bible makes Western culture accessible to the understanding, the basic texts of the Pueblo or the Navajo make their cultures, especially their literature, accessible to scholarly interpretation. It is a nearly hopeless task to explicate *House Made of Dawn* without such a familiarity, though an understanding of historical processes in the Southwest and of Western attitudes and lore is also important to this task. The basic meanings important to these American Indian systems are carried over into the book. To be unaware of the meanings of these symbols and their accompanying structures is to miss the greater part of the significance of the novel.

It is not impossible to read this novel when one is not conversant with the underlying symbolic structure, but the reading will result in confusion and distortion of what the writer was up to. It will also probably result in political distortions that will have an ultimately disastrous effect socially, for such is the power of the imagination over our more conscious activities. The symbols are there; the deep meanings are there. It is necessary to bring these factors into consciousness when studying the novel in order for them to have the ultimate curative or restorative effect which is the basic purpose of that book. For if elements improperly understood are imagined with sufficient care, a distortion will occur in our relationships with those misimagined persons. If *House Made of Dawn* is seen only as the chronicle of a man "fallen between two chairs," the impact on Indian men and women will continue to be that of victimization. For as we perceive, so we behave; and as we behave, so we create.

In order to imagine Abel as he is, the symbol-structure of the novel must be carefully examined. The underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and of the human being's place within it must be imagined truly; for Abel is not so much a man caught between two cultures and two orientations to reality as he is a medicine person who does not understand the nature of his being or of his proper function. The novel, in its structure and in its symbolic content, carefully makes this clear, though the meaning of Abel's experience is not evident unless the beliefs of the Pueblo and Navajo are taken into account. Momaday makes this point through the eyes of Angela St. John, through the eyes of Benally, and through the peculiar character of Tosamah as it contrasts with that of Abel. The identity of the protagonist is drawn through the author's personal history, through the history of the Bahkyush and through the journals of Fray Nicolás; it is apparent in the peculiar interweaving of names and places and, especially, in the sequence of events as they occur in the novel.

House Made of Dawn is an act of the imagination designed to heal; it is about the relationship between good and evil, and the proper place of a certain human being within that relationship. It is not about redemption,¹⁴ for redemption is not a Pueblo (indeed, not an American Indian) notion; it is not about a fall from grace. It is about sickness and disharmony, and about health and harmony. The title is the clue: "House Made of Dawn" is the first line of the chant sung on the third day of the Navajo healing ceremony called the Night Chant. It is the first prayer of the third morning ritual; the third day is designated the Day of the West.¹⁵ The prayer appears in the third chapter of the novel. Narrated by the Navajo friend of Abel, Ben Benally, this chapter is concerned with Abel's sojourn in Los Angeles, the major relocation center for southwestern Indians on the west coast. The prayer is sung in the Night Chant as part of the Purification section of the ceremony, and is accompanied by a rite in which a set of eight prayer offerings "sacred to gods of the shrine known as the House Made of Dawn (in the distant canyon of Tséigihí)" are used to bless or purify the patient and are then sacrificed or offered to the sun.¹⁶ Tséigihí is an ancient Pueblo ruin, and the controlling metaphor of the book can be said to be the relationship of the sun to Abel. The sun forms the central issue of life at Walatowa (Momaday 1969:177). It is the race which

is performed each year at spring equinox as an offering of the strength of the people to the sun and as a source of strength and power among them for the coming planting season which frames the book. The peyote ceremony in Los Angeles is a sun rite, and so is one of the purification rituals which Abel must go through (pp. 101-106). It is also significant that a patient participating in a Night Chant offers himself on the last morning of his healing to the rising sun, singing these words:

Thus will it be beautiful.
Thus walk in beauty, my grandchild.

As these words are sung, the patient faces east and breathes in the breath of dawn.¹⁷

In addition to these clues, Momaday has structured his novel in ways that are directly analogous to the major Chantway structure. The events of twelve days are chronicled, and each of these is divided into subsections that consist of flashbacks, events of that day in the past, and events surrounding the main action on that day.

According to Leland C. Wyman, there are ten or twelve more-or-less standard rituals within a major Chantway.¹⁸ These can vary with circumstances and the particular Chantway selected for healing the particular illness troubling the patient.¹⁹ The major variants which appear in *House Made of Dawn* include the consecration of the hogan (which does not appear in the novel until Abel returns home), a short singing, a setting-out of prayer offerings, a purification, an offering ceremony (to attract the Holy People), a cleansing, an all-night singing, a shock rite, blackening and ash-blowing, and the final dawn procedure. A feature of a healing is that various ceremonies may be tried experimentally; it seems that this may be the case with Abel. Another practice of note is the fact that the completion of a ceremonial healing may be delayed for years.²⁰ Not surprisingly within a Native American framework seven years pass as Abel seeks his appropriate ceremonial and is finally healed.

In addition to the ceremonial structure, there is a layer-structure that is Pueblo at the deepest layer, Christian at the next layer, and modern Anglo at the topmost layer. Or, to phrase it another way, the book at its most superficial layer is about a displaced Indian caught between the old and the new; it is, in that sense, a sociological novel. In its middle layer it is concerned with religious conflict, that conflict which began with the first Franciscan mis-

sionaries in the Southwest and continues on to the present in the person of John Big Bluff Tosamah, missionary and Priest of the Sun. Its deepest layer is Indian: the tradition, the knowledge, the deep values of the Indian on a continent whose land and creatures are also Indian, but whose surface has been overlaid with a thin epidermis of European society. In its branching and circularity, the novel operates structurally in a way similar to the Navajo Chantway system, and in its careful divisioning it follows the number structure of 4-7-6 and 12, which are the major ceremonial numbers of the American Indian and are the classic divisions of a major chantway.

III

Ei Yeil A bear and a maiden. And she was a white woman
and she thought it up, you know, made it up out of her own mind,
and it was like that old grandfather talking to me, telling me about
Esdza shash nadle, or *Dzil quioi*, yes, just like that. . . . A long time
ago it was dark, and you looked in the fire and listened, and he
was going on about all he knew, and he knew everything and there
was no end to the stories and the songs. (170)

As the mythic structure of *Moby Dick* is the Bible, so the mythic structure of *House Made of Dawn* is Beautyway and Night Chant.²¹ As there are departures from the source in the former, so there are departures from the text in the latter. This is the nature of continuity: to bring those structures and symbols which retain their essential meaning forward into a changed context in such a way that the metaphysical point remains true, in spite of apparently changed circumstances. It is, perhaps, a manifestation of that law which demands that literature have a quality that appeals to humankind universally: Surely there is no more universal a theme than that of the play between good and evil, and no more universal a plot than the part humanity plays in the balance between them. There are those laws of our being which are always true; there are those processes common to humankind which always occur. It is this fact of commonality which allows a Kiowa to read and understand *Moby Dick*, given appropriate references, and which allows a New Englander, also appropriately guided, to read and understand *House Made of Dawn*.

The exchange between good and evil is not to be understood in the context of *House Made of Dawn* as it is understood in the context of Christian cosmology. It is the understanding that evil is an unavoidable aspect of the universe which finally allows Abel to begin his return to wholeness and to his proper place in things. It is the way of the Christian to oppose evil, and this Abel attempts to do. But it wounds him, like the arms of the dying witch, "only in proportion as Abel resisted" (Momaday 1969:78).

Abel had thought that he could leave the pueblo and get a job, but he did not reckon with universal processes. Angela St. John was to help him get a job, but then, according to what he'd told Benally, "he got himself in trouble" (Momaday 1969:161). The dream of the modern world was not for Abel, for it was his part to be Monster Slayer and, in his own time, to bring the people to a new world. The story, in its mythic dimension, began with Francisco—perhaps it began before Francisco, with the coming of the Bahkyush to Walatowa. Perhaps it began with the European invasion. But it was Francisco who slept with the daughter of a witch, and who abandoned her after their child was still-born (p. 184). And because of his perfidy and fear, Porcingula's mother (the old Pecos *bruja*) cursed Abel (p. 15). In the pueblo, witches traditionally transform themselves into snakes (or snakes turn themselves into humans for the purpose of witchcraft), and after the little boy is cursed by the Bahkyush *bruja* known as Nicolás *teah-ghau*, and runs, he hears a certain sound: the wind whistling around a snake hole, "and it filled him with dread. For the rest of his life it would be for him the particular sound of anguish" (p. 16). Indeed, for the rest of his life, as it is known to us through the novel, he would bear that curse; he would kill a snake and in turn be mortally wounded by another, the *culebra* Martinez in Los Angeles (pp. 129, 166). Yet, had it not been for the curse and for his encounters with evil, had it not been that within his own person, perhaps because of that curse, he contained the contrary principles of light and darkness, Abel could not have made that final run and delivered that final blessing to himself and his people. Abel, like his grandfather Francisco, is a *brujo* himself, and so he recognizes evil. He is Snake Man and he is Bear Man (p. 169). At some level, he is also Monster Slayer, prototypical hero of the Navajo. He is, like his grandfather, kin to those spirits who must run forever, keeping evil in its place (pp. 104, 187–

188). In order to do this he must first come to terms with the enormity of the thing; he must, like his grandfather, acknowledge that "evil had long since found him out and knew who he was" (p. 64).

The idea embodied here is perhaps strange to the Westerner. It is presumed that the forces of good are separate from the forces of evil, and the universe is conceived as a dualistic structure forever at war with itself. And so Abel perceives it, or tries to, and Tosamah perceives it so as well. But the point that is being made is that such a concept is not so: The old priest learns this, and through his journals, so does Father Olguin, who considers Fray Nicolás a saint—perhaps because the old priest was more like Francisco than like those with pious fantasies of sanctity being that condition untainted by any form of sin or evil (Momaday 1969:45–52).

The interplay between the dual forces of good and evil in this system must be recognized. It is not for human beings to attempt to annihilate either force; it might be said that it is our destiny to be forever manifesting one or the other, until we can locate the balance between them. This balance is located for Pueblos in the House of the Sun, at the mid-point of the northern and southern poles of its journey. "Just there at the saddle, where the sky is lower and brighter than elsewhere on the high black land" is the position that signals the time to clear the ditches and the "long race of the black men at dawn" (Momaday 1969: 178). The House of the Sun, which is a feature of every pueblo, is the calendar which allows the people to locate their own equilibrium in the continuous interplay of the forces of the universe; it is the ceremonial timepiece which allows a person to know "who and what and *that* they are" (p. 103).

The essential nature of pueblo life is its mysteriousness. The central issue of pueblo belief is growth and transformation; the belief in spirit is strong among them, and their life is a matter of locating the mortal being in spirit. This is not a factor of historicity, nor is it a matter of linear chronology. There is, for each individual, a perfect moment when the balance of mortal and spirit is achieved, though this moment occurs at a different point in the life of each person. Francisco achieved his perfect moment when he was a young man. He played the drum during the clan dance for the first time; he changed drums without missing a beat: "there had been nothing of time lost, no miss in the motion or the mind . . . and it was perfect" (Momaday 1969:187). Afterward, the women came

out and distributed food among the assembled people "in celebration of his perfect act. And from then on he had a voice in the clan, and the next year he healed a child who had been sick from birth" (p. 187).

In some sense, all the stories of the pueblo are about the ways in which that perfect act is achieved. The ways are different as the individuals are different; in that sense, *House Made of Dawn* is in the long tradition of the people, for it is a story about how a modern Indian locates his being within the center of all things, and achieves that equilibrium which is beyond words and thought.

But Abel is sick, disequilibrated; in order for him to discover himself balanced in the universe of being, he must be healed. The Navajo elements of the story are the healing elements, and the events which Abel experiences are analogous to those commonly experienced by those who have been wounded or cursed as they make their journey toward wholeness. For wholeness is the essential nature of healing: One who is whole is healed; one who is whole is holy.

Abel's trials are in the nature of the testing which the protagonist of the Chantway undergoes. Abel is subjected to at least eight such tests, and like the protagonists of Beautyway and of Mountaintopway, he disobeys prohibitions established by the Holy People and gets himself into trouble. But, by this disobedience, Abel, like the Chantway protagonists, is taught the ceremonial which will be brought back to the people item by item.²²

What penetrates Abel's consciousness during those final brutal weeks in Los Angeles is the song Benally sings. For him, thoughts of home, the music, the stories, are the only comfort he finds; not even Milly can reach across the barriers of his isolation after he has been wounded by Tosamah (Momaday 1969:146), and by Martinez (p. 159). Benally narrates his account: "House made of dawn. I used to tell him about those old ways, the stories and the sings, Beautyway and Night Chant. I sang some of those things, and I told him what they meant, what I thought they were about" (p. 133).

The prime feature of Navajo life is the healing.²³ Singers devote many years to learning one Chantway perfectly. The ceremonies are handed down in the traditional way, but must be learned and paid for by the apprentice before he can practice independently.²⁴ The Navajo may be the finest healers in the world; certainly, their

Chantway system is one of the more complex metaphysical systems, made even more so by its relationship to Pueblo ceremonialism. The two are related, vaguely, as are Abel and Benally, who says "We're related somehow, I think. The Navajos have a clan they call by the name of that place" (Momaday 1969:140). This relationship is an old one. It goes way back in time, beyond the coming of the Spaniards, and is as complicated in its interworkings as the Chantway system itself. The relationship is important, for clansmen have a tighter bond than might be supposed, and this bond is of more Spirit than of earth. For clanspeople derive from the same mythic, the same archetypal source; their power and their consciousness are more closely attuned, because of their common source, than are those of many blood relatives. Then, too, Benally is a deeply traditional person himself; he'd have to be since he is able to sing parts of the Chantways and talk about what they mean. Benally is not a singer, but he is as much of one as many modern priests when they meet—he is as much of one as many modern Indians will ever be, and it is enough. For through the power of his song, Abel survives the worst beating Benally has ever seen (p. 167) and returns to Walatowa to spend the seven days of Francisco's dying with him (p. 177). After preparing the old man for burial, Abel takes up his place; running into the dawn, he performs his own perfect act of pure balance, and learns the true meaning of the songs:

He was alone and running on. All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. . . . He was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. *House made of pollen, house made of dawn.* (p. 191)

So Abel finds himself healed, and in the recovery of his primal completeness he sings the chant to the sun, in the dawn light, which is sung by one who is healed.

The ceremonial is the means of achieving wholeness of being; it is the vehicle of the imagination which allows the human being to imagine himself fully—outside the bounds of social concerns, and beyond the constraints of physical imperatives. It is that part or

function of consciousness where the Spirit and the Human meet and merge and become one, and it is beyond history or time as it is far from the narrow confines of pure reason. What happens to Abel is analogous to what happens to the protagonists of Beautyway and Mountaintopway.²⁵ The narrative concerning his journey toward the center of his being is analogous to the narratives connected to the Chantways and the ceremonial narratives of the Pueblo, in which the significance of events is embodied and transmitted. It is this process of working events into meaning which makes them true—more true, perhaps, than they would have been otherwise.

Literature is that act of the mind which allows significances created by events to become apparent. If the work of literature is imbued with the power which is in the mind of the writer, that meaning will take a form and shape that is real and vital, and that will continue to bear meaning for generations to come.

"You have imagined me well, grandson, and so I am," Ko-sahn tells the writer as she stands, tiny but complete before him. And when she is done, he imagines that he is alone in the room.

NOTES

1. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper-Signet, 1969), p. 190.
2. Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," in *Literature of the American Indian: Contemporary Views and Perspectives*, ed. Abraham Chapman (New York: New American Library-Meridian, 1975), p. 96.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
7. Robert Bertholf, "On Olson, His Melville," in *An Olson-Melville Source-book, I: The New Found Land, North America*, ed. Richard Grossinger (Vermont: North Atlantic Books, 1976), p. 5.
8. Charles Olson, in Bertholf, p. 6, from *The Human Universe and Other Essays*, ed. Donald Allen (New York, 1975).
9. Charles Olson, "The Kingfishers," in *The Distances* (New York: Grover Press, 1960), p. 6.
10. Alfred North Whitehead, in Bertholf, p. 5, from Whitehead's *Modes of Thought* (1938; New York, The Free Press, 1966), pp. 6-7.

11. Bertholf, p. 28.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

13. Frank Waters, *Masked Gods: Navajo and Pueblo Ceremonialism* (rpt. 1950, Swallow Press; New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), p. xvii.

14. This interpretation is made by Barbara Strelke in her essay, "N. Scott Momaday: Racial Memory and Individual Imagination," in *Chapman*, p. 349.

15. The Night Chant, in *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature: Quetzacoatl / The Ritual of Condolence / Cuceb / The Night Chant*, ed. John Bierhorst (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p. 307.

16. Bierhorst, p. 307.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

18. Leland C. Wyman, ed. 1975. *Beautyway: A Navajo Ceremonial*. New York: Bollingen Series LIII-Pantheon Books.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

21. See Bierhorst's edition of Night Chant and Wyman's edition of Beautyway. Wyman has used the original myth recorded and translated by Father Berard Haile and a variant myth recorded by Maud Oakes in his edition.

22. Wyman, p. 27.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

25. Wyman's discussion of the stories of Beautyway and its allied chant, Mountaintopway, casts a great deal of light on the symbolic story of *House Made of Dawn*, especially pp. 15-35, which shows a relationship between these sister chants and Night Chant.